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ABSTRACT

The American Council on Education, in cooperation with University Research Corporation, has undertaken a major research program involving the City University of New York's (CUNY) open admissions experience. The information presented in this paper is based on: (1) intensive interviews with Open Admissions freshmen; (2) data obtained from Student Information Forms completed by all CUNY freshmen; and (3) national figures abstracted from the ACE publication "National Norms for Entering College Freshmen-Fall 1970." The discussion focuses on the key characteristics in terms of type of high school diploma obtained, political preferences, residency, parental income, highest degree planned, and highest parental education, of (1) white, black, and Puerto Rican Open Admissions freshmen; (2) white, black, and Puerto Rican CUNY freshmen; and (3) students nationally. In addition, the different opinions of white, black, and Puerto Rican CUNY freshmen are discussed on: (1) the desirability of the Open Admissions (OA) policy; (2) OA's effect on CUNY's reputation; (3) using the same standards in awarding degrees; (4) employment of minority teachers; (5) the lowering of academic standards; (6) the need for separate colleges for educationally disadvantaged youth; (7) the effect of OA on encouraging or discouraging students to attend CUNY; and (8) the effect of OA on the students' own plans to attend CUNY. (AF)

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Characteristics of Freshmen Students at the City University of New York*

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Open admissions has been the subject of much debate in the last few years but, for the most part, few issues in the debate have been settled. For all the discussion about the concept, its appropriate scope, and the manner of its implementation, it still remains a largely untested or experimental approach to enlarging the bounds of those who might be served by our system of higher education. Consequently, the experiment carried out for the last year at the City University of New York represents a very important venture, first for the City University but also for the survival of this entirely new approach to education. For this reason, it is important to learn about the experience of CUNY students and institutions with the somewhat new learning environment fostered by this policy. The American Council on Education, in cooperation with University Research Corporation, has taken on a major research involvement with CUNY's experience, in which extensive and varied data were collected last Fall and plans are that new data will be collected this Fall. In this paper, some of the data now available from ACE sources will be presented, in an effort to help clarify certain issues with regard to the students who enrolled at City University during its first year of Open Admissions.

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*A paper presented at a symposium on open admissions at the American Psychological Association meeting, September 3, 1971.

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Method and Background

ACE's research involved several approaches, two of which are the basis for the data presented here. First, in order to understand more about the students who were able to attend CUNY only as a result of Open Admissions, intensive interviews were conducted with students who were considered either "open admissions" or "regular" students. The two groups were differentiated according to whether they would have been accepted at their college under previous admissions standards. Secondly, all CUNY freshmen were asked to fill out a Student Information Form (SIF) in the Fall of 1970 as they began their school year. This form contained items on a wide range of biographic and demographic characteristics and on a number of behaviors, goals, and attitudes as well. Overall, we have these data on about two-thirds of the first-time CUNY freshmen for Fall, 1970. The Student Information Form contained some items specific to the City University as well as the standard items from the basic form administered by ACE's Office of Research at colleges and universities across the country as part of its continuing program of Cooperative Institutional Research. The nationwide data from all students surveyed are weighted in order to provide a normative picture of the college freshman population. The normative data presented here are thus based on ACE's data file on approximately 180,000 freshmen entering 275 institutions of higher learning in Fall, 1970.

All three sources are utilized in this paper: data on Open Admissions freshmen are based on the intensive interviews; data on CUNY freshmen in general are derived from SIF tabulations; while national figures are abstracted from

the current ACE publication on norms.*

Findings

In some ways, the CUNY students are very much like their counterparts, nationally. The bulk of the freshmen (43 percent) characterized their political preference as "middle of the road," for instance, and only 5 percent accepted a "far left" description; national figures are roughly the same (at 45 percent and 3 percent, respectively). Even though New York City may seem to represent a somewhat unusual job market, CUNY freshmen are basically similar to students nationally in terms of their overall occupational aspirations, that is, first by choosing a wide range of responses, and secondly by showing any clustering only on such fields as business or education.

CUNY students do differ in a number of ways from students nationally, however. Almost all of CUNY students live at home and commute to school, for instance; the majority also were born and brought up in New York City, an urban environment in many respects unique. City University itself is part of that uniqueness: nationally, about two-thirds of freshman students report that half or more of their high school graduating class went on to college; in New York City, 80 percent of CUNY freshmen report this statistic.

Ethnicity is a significant differentiating factor in New York City, also. National norms indicate that 89 percent of freshmen in the Fall of 1970 were

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*National Norms for Entering College Freshmen-Fall 1970. ACE Research Reports, Vol. 5, No. 6, December, 1970.

white, and only nine percent were Black. CUNY figures, as prepared by the University's Department of Budget and Planning,* show that 17.1 percent of the Fall 1970 freshman class were Black and another 8 percent were Puerto Rican. These figures partly represent the result of open admissions policies and partly represent the impact of recent efforts to eradicate past discrepancies; progress has been made since 1967, when only 10.5 percent of CUNY's freshmen were Black or Puerto Rican. By way of comparison, it is estimated that the New York City high school graduating class for 1970 was 16 percent Black and 10 percent Puerto Rican.

More importantly, however, ethnic groups differ vastly in their socio-economic circumstances. Of white students, numerically the largest group by far, fewer than a quarter are from families with a total income of less than $8,000. Further, almost half said they have no concern about their ability to finance their college education, and almost two-thirds cited their family as the largest single source of funds for their studies. In contrast, Black and Puerto Rican students have a less secure financial background: the large majority (65 and 75 percent, respectively) come from families with incomes below $8,000; possibly in consequence, only 15 percent said they have no concern about financing their education and, in fact, about 30 percent reported it was a major concern for them. Only about 40 percent of the Black and Puerto Rican freshmen cited their families as a major financial source and, instead, about a third (32 and 27 percent,

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*Report of the Fall 1970 Undergraduate Ethnic Census, The City University of New York, Department of Budget and Planning, December, 1970.

respectively) rely on scholarships and grants.

As can be seen from Table 1, CUNY freshmen in general, and Black and Puerto Rican freshman students in particular, are much more likely than students nationally to be in the first generation of their families to attend college. Two-thirds or more of all CUNY freshmen said that their parents had never attended college, while 44 percent of students nationally have a parent who has had some college experience.

One important issue in the debate surrounding open admissions is the extent to which students enter college largely unprepared for college-level work. The data on the type of academic diploma held by CUNY freshmen, shown in Table 2, lends some perspective to this aspect of the debate. Basically, it appears that most CUNY freshmen, and most of the Open Admissions freshmen as well (two-thirds of whites and about half of Blacks and Puerto Ricans), completed an academic program of study in high school. Among the Open Admissions sample, most of the others took a general program and only a few--4 percent of whites, 8 percent of Blacks, and 12 percent of Puerto Ricans--enrolled in college on the basis of a technical or vocational program in high school. The qualitative strength of these credentials cannot be evaluated at this time, but it is true that most CUNY freshmen, and most Open Admissions freshmen, have taken the types of courses traditionally believed to be appropriate preparation for college-level study.

Our information on the educational aspirations of CUNY freshmen offers a number of other insights. First, all CUNY freshmen groups under discussion here are every bit as ambitious as students nationally. About half of fresh-

men nationwide hope to go beyond the bachelor's degree, (mainly to attain a master's degree); very similar proportions of CUNY freshmen, and of Open Admissions students too, said they hoped to attain an advanced degree. It should also be noted that very few CUNY freshmen, even among the Open Admissions groups, estimated that they would stop at an Associate level degree, even though at least one-third in each group are now enrolled in two-year colleges.

The data presented in Table 2 should also add to any discussion on the impact of the Open Admissions policy on students. Some striking patterns can been seen. First, most of the CUNY freshmen agree that Open Admissions is a good idea in the abstract, in that it offers students a second chance and equalizes opportunities for education. They uniformly agree also that colleges should maintain the same performance standards in awarding degrees. Similar agreement exists about the undesirability of setting up separate colleges for Black, white, or Puerto Rican students.

Yet, the various ethnic groups part company on a number of important dimensions. On the statements arguing that Open Admissions would cause a college's reputation to suffer, or a lowering of academic standards, or a decreased likelihood that the city's outstanding graduates would attend CUNY, half or more of the white freshmen agreed with this dismal view; Black and Puerto Rican students were mainly in disagreement with those arguments. Further, 41 percent of the white freshmen, but many fewer of the others, would agree that separate colleges should exist for those with high school deficiences. Alternately, half of the white freshmen at CUNY, but three-

quarters of Black or Puerto Rican freshmen, agreed that more minority teachers should be employed.

Table 2 also shows our data on student's assessment of the personal impact of Open Admissions. Perhaps surprisingly, half of the white CUNY freshmen and about a third of Black and Puerto Rican freshmen, said it had no influence one way or the other. Only a very few--about a tenth--felt that announcement of the policy had discouraged them from attending. We don't have the opinions of those who chose <u>not</u> to enroll at CUNY, of course, but these data do suggest that a solid number of white CUNY students are accepting of the open admissions policy. Notably, however, only a tenth of the whites thought that the new policy made college possible for them; in contrast, 24 percent of Blacks and 29 percent of Puerto Rican freshmen felt that Open Admissions made college possible.

Overall these data on student attitudes and circumstances, as of Fall of 1970, only begin to tell the story of Open Admissions and its impact. Much more information will be available in the future; at this point, however, even incomplete and exploratory data should provide valuable factual basis to the debate.

TABLE 1

Key Characteristics of CUNY Freshmen As Compared
To Students Nationally
(In Percentages)

Characteristics	Open Admissions Freshmen			All CUNY Freshmen			Students
	White N=465	Black N=116	Puerto Rican N=40	White N=11557	Black N=1550	Puerto Rican N=794	Nationally
Type of High School Diploma							
Academic	67	45	45	85	53	51	
General	23	40	32	4	12	11	
Vocational, technical	4	8	12	6	17	19	
Commercial	4	5	10	6	17	18	
GED, other	1	2	0	0	2	1	
Highest Degree Planned							
None	3	3	0	1	1	1	2
Associate	10	12	13	8	15	18	8
Bachelor's	43	35	45	33	37	37	39
Master's	35	36	34	37	32	30	32
Doctorate, other advanced	10	15	8	21	15	13	18
Highest Parental Education							
At least some college work	22	31	24	29	17	9	44
High school degree or less	78	69	76	71	83	91	56

Table 2

Opinions of CUNY Freshmen About the Impact of Open Admissions
(In Percentages)

Opinions	White N=11,557	Black N=1,550	Puerto Rican N=794
Per cent agreeing that:			
Open admissions is a good idea because it equalizes opportunities for higher education.	79	95	93
The reputation of this college will suffer because of open admissions.	52	18	24
In spite of open admissions, the college should use the same performance standards in awarding degrees to all students.	90	87	87
With open admissions, more minority teachers should be employed.	49	75	73
Open admissions will probably lower the academic standards of this college.	60	26	32
Open admissions is okay, but the students who have high school deficiencies or poor marks should attend separate colleges.	41	18	23
Open admissions is a good idea because it offers many students a second chance.	87	95	95
Open admissions has discouraged many of the city's outstanding high school graduates from attending this college.	54	22	26
Open admissions will be more successful if the City University sets up separate colleges for black, white, Puerto Rican students.	10	9	7
Effect of Open Admissions on own plans:			
Made college possible	10	24	29
Encouraged me to go, but would have gone anyway	27	37	37
Discouraged me from applying	12	2	3
Had no influence	52	38	32